United Nations A/S-23/PV.10 (Resumption 1)

General Assembly

Twenty-third special session

Official Records

10th meeting

Saturday, 10 June 2000, 3 p.m.

New York

President: Mr. Gurirab ..... (Namibia)

The meeting was suspended at 10.55 p.m. on 9 June and resumed at 5.10 p.m. on 10 June.

Tribute to the memory of His Excellency Mr. Hafez Al-Assad, President of the Syrian Arab Republic

The President: It is my sad duty to inform members of the General Assembly of the death of His Excellency Mr. Hafez Al-Assad, President of the Syrian Arab Republic. On behalf of the General Assembly, I should like to convey our condolences to the Government and people of the Syrian Arab Republic and to the bereaved family of President Al-Assad.

I invite representatives to stand and observe a minute of silence in tribute to the memory of the President.

The members of the General Assembly observed a minute of silence.

The President: I should like to inform members that a formal tribute to the memory of President Al-Assad will be paid at the next meeting in the fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly, on Thursday afternoon, 15 June 2000.

Agenda items 8 and 9 (*continued*)

Review and appraisal of progress made in the implementation of the twelve critical areas of concern in the Beijing Platform for Action

Further actions and initiatives for overcoming obstacles to the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action

Report of the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole of the Twenty-third Special Session (A/S-23/10)

Agenda item 10

Adoption of the final documents

The President: For the text of the report, representatives should see documents A/S-23/AC.1/L.1 and Addenda 1 to 42 and Corrigendum 1 to Addendum 16, as well as document A/S-23/AC.1/L.2.

I now request Ms. Mónica Martínez of Ecuador, Vice-Chairperson of the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole of the Twenty-third Special Session, acting as Rapporteur, to introduce the report.

Ms. Martínez (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): I have the honour of presenting the report of the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole of the Twenty-third Special Session.

As the Assembly will recall, the Ad Hoc Committee was responsible for finalizing a document for consideration at this special session under agenda items 8 and 9. The Ad Hoc Committee held a number

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of informal consultations on the outcome document and devoted its final meeting to an exchange of views.

I should like to take this opportunity to conclude the report, adding certain information not included in the printed documents before us. In document A/S-23/AC.1/L.1, "3" is to be inserted in the first blank space in paragraph 2 and "9 and 10" in the second blank space before "June". After paragraph 10 we insert the following new language:

> "At the 2nd meeting, on 9 June, statements were made by the Director-General of the World Health Organization, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Europe, the representatives of the World Bank, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the International Fund for Agricultural Development. Statements were also made by observers of the following non-governmental organizations: Caucus on violence against women; Uprooted Women's Caucus; Asia Pacific Women's Watch; Media caucus; Non-governmental organizations committee on mental health; International Network of Girls and World Vision; Agence de recherches d'information et de formation pour les femmes; International Self-reliance Agency for Women, Inc.; Soroptimist International (on behalf of a number of non-governmental organizations); World Association of Community Radio Broadcast; and African Women's Development Network."

The first line of paragraph 11 should read:

> "At the 3rd meeting, on 10 June 2000,"

The rest of the sentence remains unchanged.

The following text should be added after paragraph 11:

> "At its 3rd meeting, on 10 June, the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole considered its draft report (A/S-23/AC.1/L.1 and addenda 1-42) and two draft resolutions submitted by the Chairperson in document A/S-23/AC.1/L.2. Statements were made by the representatives of Honduras, Colombia (also on behalf of Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela), Gabon, Cuba, Mauritania, Nigeria (on behalf of the Group of 77 and China), the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Nicaragua, the Sudan, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Canada (on behalf of "JUSCANZ"), Argentina, Iraq, Bangladesh and Saudi Arabia."

Finally, in paragraph 12, "resolution" should be changed to "resolutions".

The President: The Assembly takes note of the oral amendments and additions.

If there is no proposal under rule 66 of the rules of procedure, I shall take it that the Assembly will not discuss the report.

It is so decided.

Statements will therefore be limited to explanation of vote. The positions of delegations regarding the recommendations of the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole of the Twenty-third Special Session have been made clear in the Committee. May I remind delegations that, in accordance with General Assembly decision 34/401, explanations of vote are limited to 10 minutes and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Ms. De Villedpa (Honduras) (*spoke in Spanish*): The delegation of the Republic of Honduras reaffirms its satisfaction with the manner in which this session has been conducted and expresses to the delegation, the people and the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic its deep condolences at the passing of President Hafez Al-Assad.

We also reaffirm our intention to accept and support the provisions adopted at this Conference, joining the consensus of the various delegations gathered here.

Our Government and President Carlos Flores have the following reservations, which should be fully incorporated into the final report of this Conference. Our reservations are based on the fact that we are a signatory to the Inter-American Convention on Human Rights and on article 65 of the Constitution of the Republic, as well as article 12 of the children's and adolescents' code, which guarantee the right to life from the moment of conception, on the basis of the moral, ethical, religious and cultural principles that must govern the human community and in accordance with internationally recognized human rights.

Articles 111 and 112 of the Constitution stipulate that the State must protect the institution of matrimony, the family, maternity and childhood. Therefore, Honduras accepts the concept of family planning, reproductive health, risk-free maternity, regulation of fertility and reproductive and sexual rights, when they do not include abortion or the interruption of pregnancy as arbitrary actions, since Honduras does not accept them as methods of regulating fertility or of birth control, being contrary to the morals and good traditions that are the basis of our legislation.

New language, terminology and concepts introduced into the document merit greater analysis to reflect their precise meaning, free of interpretations that undermine respect for the human person, morals and good traditions; the delegation of Honduras can accept such terminology only when it does not undermine its national legislation.

At the same time, we affirm that actions to promote the status of women and their involvement in political, social and economic development must be carried out in such a way as not to endanger protection of the family, maternity and the rights of parents to educate their children, as guaranteed by our legislation.

Ms. Al-Thani (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to express our heartfelt condolences to the great Syrian people and the Arab nation on the passing of President Hafez Al-Assad. May God bless his soul.

I also wish to convey our gratitude to the Chairperson of the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole and to the members of the Bureau and the Secretariat, the organizers, liaison officers and the interpreters, for their considerable efforts in facilitating the work of delegations and in the conduct of the negotiations.

My delegation has effectively participated in the negotiations on this final document of the twenty-third special session, based on Qatar's determination to advance the status of women. We would like to thank all of the delegations that contributed to the consensus, of which we are a part, and we would like to reiterate that Qatar will implement all of the recommendations in accordance with our Constitution, our laws and our national traditions. Further, we would like our statement to be incorporated into the final report of the session.

Ms. Mazela (Poland): The Republic of Poland wishes to support the consensus reached at this twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century" — the fifth anniversary review of the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women.

Poland wishes to submit the following reservations.

Poland, according to national law, recognizes the equality, dignity and rights of men and women in all spheres of life. We respect life from conception until natural death. We respect the absolute right of conscience, especially as concerns health-care providers' involvement in abortion procedures, and we respect freedom of religion for all peoples. We respect the right of parents to raise their children in the family, and we accord priority to parents and their obligation to educate their children.

We reiterate, and hold to, the decision made by the General Assembly, as stated in Assembly documents issued in 1996 and in Economic and Social Council documents issued in 2000, that, because the Beijing Platform for Action was accepted only after difficult compromises, the Beijing +5 review conference should not reopen negotiations on the Beijing document. Accordingly, no new wording or phraseology introduced during these negotiations will be accepted, especially terms that are not defined in United Nations consensus documents. The purpose of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly has been to review five years of implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action.

Ms. Kornegay (South Africa): The South African delegation wishes to join other Member States in expressing our sincere sympathy to the delegation of the Syrian Arab Republic on the passing of the late President Hafez Al-Assad.

My delegation is very pleased that our deliberations on Beijing+5 have been successfully concluded. Without the political will and commitment of all Member States, the negotiations, despite tough and protracted discussions, would not have resulted in the document before us.

This twenty-third special session on "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century" was convened with the objective of enabling the Governments of our countries to evaluate how far we have come in implementing our commitments. We reiterate our strong commitment to the Beijing Platform for Action, and we support the outcome document that has come out of this process. In fact, we wanted to see the Assembly take the Beijing Platform for Action even further.

The South African delegation came with a mandate and a vision to take Beijing 1995 into the new millennium. All human rights of all citizens in South Africa are protected and promoted by a Constitution and Bill of Rights. Our Constitution informed our approach to this process on the basis of choice to issues such as sexual orientation, reproductive rights and abortion. The attainment of the full and accelerated empowerment of women and girls is a constitutional priority for our country.

While we note those areas of regression on the Beijing language, we commend this body for having grappled with new challenges, such as globalization, in a manner that helps Member States to address their negative impact. We note also the courage women have shown during these five days in speaking out in defence of their human rights. In instances where this may endanger their lives, we call on the Assembly to ensure their protection.

Finally, we do not consider ourselves absolved of our commitment made in 1995 in the Platform for Action. We view the outcome document of this meeting as supplementary to the Platform. My Government is ready to endorse those areas of the outcome document which not only advance the Beijing Platform for Action but also challenge our own national goals. We look forward to implementing these, together with the Beijing Platform for Action, as well as our constitutional imperative at the local, provincial and national levels.

We wish to express appreciation to all the members of the Bureau for their sterling work, especially the Chairperson, Ms. Christine Kapalata, and Ms. Angela King of the Division for the Advancement of Women. In addition, we salute the governmental and non-governmental delegations that took part in this process. Although we did not achieve everything we wanted, we are glad South Africa has participated in this special session of the General Assembly, which focused on the challenges of improving the lives of women and girls in all of our countries.

Finally, we request that our statement be reflected in the official records of the special session.

Ms. Raveles-Resida (Suriname): On behalf of the member States of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and my own country, Suriname, I wish to express our sincere condolences on the passing of President Hafez Al-Assad of the Syrian Arab Republic, which is a great loss for the people of Syria as well as for the Arabic world and the world at large.

Allow me at the outset to express my thanks to you, Mr. President, to the Chairperson of the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole and to the Chairpersons of the working groups and contact groups, as well as to all of the representatives for their efforts, commitment and dedication during our marathon session, which have allowed us to achieve this final outcome and adopt a final document, as we are about to do.

The delegations of the member States of the Caribbean Community, 14 of which are Members of the United Nations, have gathered here in New York, some at tremendous expense, as a demonstration of our commitment to support and advance the Beijing Platform for Action.

Our countries contributed to and participated in the preparatory processes leading up to the Fourth World Conference and in Beijing itself. We have made significant sacrifices, both human and financial, to exhibit the same level of commitment to this special session on the Women 2000 review process. There has been no shortage of motivation or commitment on the part of the Caribbean Governments and peoples. To that end, our Governments prioritized the Platform for Action along six critical areas of concern: poverty, health, violence against women, education, institutional mechanisms and women in decision-making. By prioritizing the Platform for Action, the Caribbean has been able to achieve considerable progress in implementing its recommendations.

While a tremendous amount of follow-up activities have occurred within our subregion, many new challenges have presented obstacles to achieving all of the goals that we set for ourselves in 1995. For our countries, structural adjustment programmes, globalization and high external debt have been

tremendous constraints in implementing the Platform for Action. We acknowledge that globalization may have presented opportunities for some countries. However, we must emphasize that the added cost to our economies and people, particularly the women and children of the States members of the Caribbean community, has been dramatic. The loss of preferential arrangements, debt servicing and limited capacity to overcome the burden of unemployment have had enormous consequences and have increased the number of poor women in many of our countries.

The incidence of violence against women and girls has been addressed by Caribbean Governments. We have undertaken and support comprehensive measures in an ongoing effort to eliminate this practice. We have enacted anti-violence legislation, engaged in public awareness campaigns and promoted research into the root causes of violence in our societies. We are heartened to note that this concept is embedded in the proposed outcome document.

In closing, it is our resolve that the attainment of high educational levels for women in the Caribbean will be complemented by an equally high achievement in the political and economic spheres. In this respect, our efforts to achieve gender equality can be successful only if there is an honest partnership between women and men. Gender equality is therefore a win-win situation that elevates both genders, our societies and our countries.

Those of us who live in small, fragile States cannot afford to ignore the contribution of women to our sustainable development and the goals of this special session. We therefore remain committed to the further implementation of the Platform for Action and the outcome of the special session. For us, there is no margin for error.

Ms. Solorzano (Nicaragua) (*spoke in Spanish*): Nicaragua supports the consensus won here at the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly in the five-year review process of the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century". We request that the reservations we have lodged be included in the outcome document.

Our reservations touch, first, on the fact that, whenever the document refers to "commitments" or "steps taken" by Governments, it should be understood that United Nations conferences are not legally binding and that the implementation of recommendations emanating from them is the responsibility of the sovereign State of Nicaragua.

Second, Nicaragua recognizes the equality and dignity of all people and equal rights for both sexes, while interpreting the term "gender" in its generally accepted, ordinary sense, as recognized at the Beijing Fourth World Conference on Women and reflected in annex IV of the report of that Conference. Gender is the biological sexual identity of women and men. We understand that there are only two genders: the female — meaning women — and the male — meaning men. We develop our gender perspective on the basis of this understanding.

Third, Nicaragua acknowledges the right to life from the moment of conception until its natural end. That is why induced abortion or interrupted pregnancy, however construed, cannot be considered as a means of family planning or fertility regulation as defined at the Cairo International Conference on Population and Development. Any legislation governing this issue is the sovereign business of the Nicaraguan nation.

Fourth, when the document refers to contraception, we interpret the reference as not implying to any substance or method involving abortion. We accept the reference to new technologies so long as it does not imply induced abortion. Nicaragua recognizes the reproductive right and the right to health, which includes sexual and reproductive health, as a component of certain human rights already enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which recognize no connection whatsoever with induced abortion.

Fifth, Nicaragua does not recognize the terms "sexual rights" and "sexual orientation", the definition of which has not been established at United Nations forums or conferences.

Sixth, Nicaragua recognizes that the freedoms of thought, conscience and religion are inalienable rights enjoyed by all, including health workers.

Seventh, Nicaragua recognizes matrimony and de facto unions of men and women, as well as the various types of families arising from the union of a man and woman, as equal to those that are headed by a

single parent, man or woman, and to extended families. We declare our commitment to protecting these.

Eighth, we understand the term "gender equality" as meaning equity, balance, fairness, full participation, full partnership, equal access and other similar expressions, such as equality under the law, responsibility and opportunities that must exist for the sexes without discrimination — rights which are in fact enshrined in our Constitution.

Ninth, comprehensive education from childhood is the prerogative of parents under Nicaragua's Constitution, article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and article 13 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Tenth, we accept the term "risk-free maternity" so long as it does not imply abortion. Nicaragua does not recognize any new universal human right in paragraph 96 of the Platform for Action referred to in this document.

The President: Let me make a general point not addressed to the last speaker. The list continues to increase and I am informed that we have interpretation only up to 7 p.m., so I hope that we will not be repeating statements we have already made, either here or in the Committee.

Mrs. Ismail (Nigeria): I wish, on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, to convey our heartfelt condolences to the delegation of the Syrian Arab Republic on the passing away of President Hafez Al-Assad. We ask the Syrian delegation to transmit our condolences to the Government and people of the Syrian Arab Republic.

It is with great pleasure that I address this gathering on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, at the closing meeting of this historic session of the General Assembly. Beijing+5 has finally come to a successful conclusion. After five days of hard work, the women of the world — through the outcome document — have taken another step forward to consolidate the gains of the past. Now the march towards gender equality, development and peace in the twenty-first century is irreversible.

The Group of 77 salutes all delegations that have worked so hard for the historic decisions elaborated in the outcome document. Over the past few days we have devoted time to review our achievements. We have identified the obstacles and challenges facing us. More important, we have taken new initiatives to combat poverty, particularly among women. Equally, we have taken important initiatives on violence against women. Practical steps have also been taken to advance women's and girls' education and to extend the frontiers of women's rights.

Overall, the outcome document has laid before us a wave of new initiatives in the form of programmes and projects. We urge that they be effectively pursued and implemented in all the critical areas of concern. We expect action at the national and international levels. In this regard, we expect the solid support and involvement of the multilateral institutions. The partnership we forged with civil society organizations in Beijing has been further strengthened.

The statements made by the leaders of respective delegations of member States of the Group of 77 in plenary meetings send one clear and loud message — that for the countries of developing nations the issue of political will and commitment to the goal of gender equality is beyond doubt. All have demonstrated through concrete action the determination to march forward towards the goal of empowering women. Practically all have undertaken policy reforms and established mechanisms that will propel gender equality and opportunities for women. They have all shown unwavering commitment towards gender mainstreaming in their developmental goals.

It is now for the international community, the developed countries and the multilateral financial institutions to demonstrate their commitment to genuine cooperation with the developing countries in the areas of the advancement of women. In this connection, I renew the call on developed countries to support in concrete terms, through financial resources, the efforts of developing countries in the implementation of policies for sustained economic growth and development. This is the only way in which we will be able to reposition our countries and our peoples for the great task ahead, particularly as we set out in the outcome document. We trust that at the dawn of the new millennium — indeed, because of our common humanity — our partners will not fail us in this historic task.

In closing, let me through you, Mr. President, thank all delegations for their spirit of flexibility, which ensured that we have not gathered in vain in New York over the past five days, but have

significantly advanced the interests of the women of the world. I must also thank the Secretary-General and the entire staff of the Secretariat, who have worked so hard for the success of this momentous event. We wish all delegations a very safe journey back to their destinations.

Mr. Balzan (Malta): At the outset, I join previous speakers in expressing on behalf of the Government and people of Malta heartfelt sympathies and condolences to the Government and people of the Syrian Arab Republic on the sad loss of President Al-Assad.

Malta welcomes the progress achieved in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, and reiterates its commitment to the promotion of gender equality, development and peace, and the promotion and protection of women's human rights.

In joining consensus on the outcome document of the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century", the delegation of Malta would like to reaffirm its reservation made to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action on the use of such terms as "reproductive health", reproductive rights", "sexual rights", "circumstances in which abortion is not against the law", "such abortions should be safe", and with respect to those sections of the document that directly or indirectly relate to induced abortion. The interpretation given by Malta is consistent with its national legislation, which considers that termination of pregnancy through induced abortion is illegal.

The delegation of Malta further reaffirms its reserved position on those parts of the document wherein reference is made to the outcome documents of particular conferences. In this respect, the delegation of Malta reaffirms its reservations as contained in the reports of the respective conferences. Furthermore, the delegation of Malta reaffirms its reserved position on the use of the wording "international human rights instruments and United Nations consensus documents" wherever used in the outcome document with its previous acceptance or non-acceptance of them.

It is requested that these reservations be recorded in the report of the special session.

Mr. Candioti (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the delegations of the member countries of the Southern Cone Common Market (MERCOSUR) — Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay — and the associated countries of Bolivia and Chile, I wish to inform the Assembly that on the occasion of the holding of this important gathering in the context of the theme "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century", these six delegations have undertaken a commitment to continue to develop a common agenda on women's issues. I will provide the Secretariat with the text of that agenda, with the request of the six delegations that it be made part of the official documents of the special session.

I should like to express again our condolences to the delegation of the Syrian Arab Republic for the tremendous loss they have suffered through the passing of President Al-Assad.

I should also like to tell you, Mr. President, how deeply grateful we are to you for the way in which you have conducted the special session. The same goes for the other members of the Bureau, and in particular to the entire Secretariat staff, who have made possible, through enormous dedication and effort, the results we have so far been able to achieve.

Mr. Mutaboba (Rwanda): My delegation joins others in expressing our deepest sympathy to the Government and people of Syria on the passing away of President Al-Assad.

My delegation is highly disappointed that paragraph 51 of the final outcome document has been adopted without a reference to genocide and other crimes against humanity, as suggested earlier by the Group of 77's more adequate language.

The reason given was nothing but a technicality, according to which other paragraphs could then be opened for discussion. That is not true, and we continue strongly to believe that. The majority of delegations do not accept that excuse, and my delegation wishes to express its strongest reservations on that omission.

That omission sends an odd message — a very strange one indeed — to the membership of the United Nations: that the crimes of genocide that have occurred in previous years are not taken seriously by some Members. My delegation wishes to remind everyone that the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide binds all those that have signed and ratified it. Conveniently avoiding this point

is a serious omission, and we wish to distance ourselves from it, because we know what happened to our people — and especially to women and children, who are our focus today. The consequences will last for generations, and the Rwandan delegation considers this omission to indicate disregard for the suffering that our people — especially women and children — have endured and continue to endure.

Genocide is not a Rwandan phenomenon; it is the worst form of crime against humanity and should therefore be condemned on all occasions by all Member States that uphold the principles enshrined in the United Nations Charter and in the genocide Convention. We seem to choose to close our eyes when we should be keeping them open. We are sending the wrong message. It should be the practice of the United Nations and of others to ensure that our past mistakes are corrected whenever the chance is offered.

I take this opportunity to thank the representatives of South Africa, the Sudan, Libya, Syria, Iran and many others for their strong support and their tireless efforts through the long hours of this morning to secure the inclusion of "genocide and other crimes against humanity" as a phrase in the text.

It is thus our duty to express our serious and strong reservations about the text and the language used, which omits reference to genocide and other crimes against humanity.

We wish to reaffirm the commitment of the Government of Rwanda to observe the rest of the recommended paragraphs in the draft outcome document, and our full political support in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action.

Ms. King (United States of America): On behalf of my delegation and of the United States Mission to the United Nations, I would like to express condolences to the Syrian delegation and to the Syrian people on the death of President Al-Assad.

The United States is pleased to join consensus on the draft document before us, which represents an important milestone in the international community's efforts to promote the advancement of women. The United States has submitted to the Secretariat a written interpretive statement that we request be included in the proceedings of this conference; in part, our consensus is based thereon.

The United States understands that, as with the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, any commitments referred to in the draft outcome document for further actions and initiatives to implement the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action attributed to States are, unless such States indicate to the contrary, not legally binding, and that they consist of recommendations concerning how States can and should promote the objectives of the Conference. Therefore, those references to commitments constitute a general commitment to undertake meaningful implementation of the recommendations overall, rather than a specific commitment to implement each element thereof. Further, the United States wishes to emphasize that only States parties are obligated to implement treaties.

In the context of the Beijing Platform for Action, there are certain key issues directly connected to issues of gender and the furtherance of women's rights. In particular, the United States Government has a firm policy of non-discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and considers that the omission of such a position from the draft outcome document in no way justifies such discrimination in any country.

In addition, the United States fully supports the call in the Platform for Action for Governments to recognize and address the health impact of unsafe abortions. We regret that little progress has been made. Since Beijing, nearly 400,000 women have died unnecessarily from unsafe abortion. Even where abortion is legal under certain circumstances, too many countries have not yet trained and equipped health care providers; nor have they taken other measures to ensure that abortions are safe and accessible or to safeguard women's health. We are heartened and encouraged that actions to address the health impact of unsafe abortions as a major public health concern were specified in the five-year review of the International Conference on Population and Development. On this very important issue — saving and protecting women's lives and health — the United States will be guided by the consensus language adopted in the report of the General Assembly's 1999 special session on the International Conference on Population and Development + 5 on steps the international community is committed to take to save the lives of women.

The United States wishes to draw attention to the fact that a number of institutions, organizations and others have been requested to implement the draft

outcome document. Nonetheless, Governments alone will adopt the draft political declaration and outcome document. When the draft outcome document mentions the actions these other actors may take, it thereby invites and encourages the suggested actions; it does not, and cannot, require such actions. We understand that references to actions that the media may take are in the nature of suggestions and recommendations. They may not be construed to allow any impingement on the freedom of the press, speech and expression, which are fundamental democratic freedoms.

As to the use of the term "foreign occupation", the United States recognizes that human rights violations can and do occur in situations of foreign occupation around the world. Nonetheless, the United States continues to have reservations, as it did at the World Conference on Human Rights, held at Vienna in 1993, about any implication that foreign occupation is a human rights violation per se. The United States must request that the record of today's proceedings reflect that the United States dissociates itself from the paragraphs in the draft outcome document currently numbered 29, 30 *ter* and 125 (c), dealing with globalization and economic issues, and is generally concerned about the language in the document that deals with those issues. Those paragraphs characterize globalization and debt as significant obstacles to achieving gender equality. It is our view that national Governments bear the primary responsibility for social and economic development and for ensuring equality for women in all walks of life. Most aspects of equality for women have no direct link to international economic and financial issues.

The record should show also that the United States dissociates itself from the paragraph currently numbered 133 (m) *bis*, which concerns disarmament. The United States has two concerns with this paragraph.

First, the United States disagrees with the paragraph's assertion that the United Nations establishes priorities for disarmament. We believe that establishing priorities for disarmament is the prerogative of Member States of the United Nations. Secondly, the paragraph proposes that resources made available as a result of disarmament activities be allocated to social programmes which benefit women and girls. While the United States strongly supports economic and social development programmes, especially those that promote gender equality, the United States also has a long-standing position of not linking the two distinct issues of disarmament and the predetermined use of resources, if any, realized from disarmament.

The United States reiterates, with respect to all references to foreign assistance and official development assistance, that it is not one of the countries that have accepted an "agreed target" for such assistance or have made commitments to fulfil any targets.

The United States fully supports the objectives of the outcome document and is willing to work with others to ensure that there is a proper allocation of resources to address the commitments made in that document. However, the United States cannot agree to an increase in funding for matters dealt with in the outcome document, other than in the context of reallocation of existing resources, or unless sources of funding other than governmental assessments are involved.

Finally, the United States notes that many of the issues covered by the outcome document were, of course, covered in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Therefore, the United States understands that the written interpretive statement that it submitted in that connection is applicable, where relevant and appropriate, to the outcome document.

Ms. Ngoma (Gabon) (*spoke in French*): As Chairman of the African Group, and on behalf of the Gabonese delegation, I would like to convey my deep condolences to the delegation of the Syrian Arab Republic on the passing of President Hafez Al-Assad, who played an important role on the international scene, particularly in the Middle East. The African Group will take the opportunity to express its sympathy to the sisterly people of Syria again when the General Assembly pays formal tribute.

We support the declaration made by Nigeria on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

Mr. President, allow me to congratulate you and all the members of the Bureau on the manner in which you have conducted the work of this special session. We also congratulate the members of the Preparatory Committee and of the Secretariat who have done their utmost to provide all the necessary elements for us to conduct our work smoothly, even though there were

some problems with translation in the other official languages.

Throughout our work Africa has made every effort to carry out its responsibilities in order to reach a successful end to this Conference. New York is a turning point for Governments, non-governmental organizations and civil society to become conscious of the need for the promotion of women in the overall development policy of each country — a turning point because we have once again reaffirmed our support for the Beijing Platform for Action and for the Declaration of the Cairo International Conference on Population and Development.

Consequently, we have overcome our differences and seen our common interests. Consensus has contributed greatly to this success in our work. However, sovereignty still rules, bearing in mind the political, cultural, economic and social concepts of each country. We have to show, more than ever before, that all members of society — men, women and children — can contribute more effectively to the building of their nations. Women the world over are the keepers of moral values in society. They can only accept this role fully in symbiosis with men. We ask our development partners to provide the necessary resources for the application of international programmes to which we have subscribed. However, we express our regret that the final document has not been translated into all the working languages of the United Nations.

Ms. Tall (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the President of the Republic of Senegal, His Excellency Mr. Abdoulaye Wade, and of my delegation, I endorse the condolences expressed by others to the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic and its entire people on the passing of President Hafez Al-Assad. We pray that Mother Earth will receive him and that God will welcome him in Paradise.

My delegation stands shoulder to shoulder with the rest of Africa and the entire African Group in endorsing the statement made on behalf of the G-77 and welcomes the success that has capped this twenty-third special session. We have in our hands a final document of the utmost significance to women the world over, a final document that is balanced, and takes into account the interests and concerns of delegations, as well as the fundamental role played by non-governmental organizations and civil society in making a reality of the Beijing Platform for Action and fresh initiatives to be adopted at this session.

We owe this outcome to the spirit of cooperation sustained throughout this process shown by all of us, by the Secretariat, the Chairpersons of our meetings, the representatives that have participated in this session, and the various actors and partners, all of us acting in the spirit of consensus which has carried the day through this final document. We have no reservations, although we would have liked to see a more aggressive document. We reiterate our commitment to translating into deeds all the recommendations that have come out of our work concerning strict respect for human rights, as well as to peace and development in our respective countries.

International cooperation should be reinforced to allow us to come up with innovative solutions to the economic and financial constraints facing developing countries, notably in Africa, so that we may better translate into reality the common commitments made by the international community to protect and promote the fundamental rights of women.

I conclude by thanking you, Mr. President, personally, and by thanking Secretary-General Kofi Annan, Ms. Angela King and the entire Secretariat for the perfect organization of this special session.

Ms. Lozano Eljure (Colombia) (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of Colombia and the following Latin American countries — Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Costa Rica, Chile, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela — I wish to express sincere condolences to the delegation and people of the Syrian Arab Republic on the death of the President of the Republic, Hafez Al-Assad.

We wish to make the following statement, which we request become part of the final records of this special session.

In the context of the twenty-third special session of the United Nations General Assembly, "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century", our delegations have brought a shared, region-wide vision to the advances, challenges, lessons and good practices developed in the first five years since the Beijing Platform for Action began to be implemented.

The regional consensus enshrined in the Santiago and Lima documents have guided and strengthened the commitment by our respective Governments to move the Beijing review process forward, the reason for this special session. Approximately a year's work in this regard has highlighted a broad range of positions making up a complex context for achieving the consensus-based visions relating to the themes embodied in the Beijing Platform for Action. Our region, linked by common experience and the determination to attain the human rights of all women, adolescents and girls, makes progress through the implementation of the Platform for Action, incorporating it into the sovereign development policies of each country.

We have especially emphasized the right to health, to participation and to development within a context of sexual and gender equality, free of violence. We reaffirm our commitment to creating the conditions that will make possible a fuller life for women with the exercise of the rights that they are entitled to, as citizens of this planet. This will lead in the context of our countries' sustainable development, to a society of women and men that is ever more humane, tolerant, healthy, productive and happy.

Mr. Bahaitham (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): My delegation congratulates you, Mr. President, on the successful outcome of this twenty-third special session. We thank you for your great efforts, as well as those of the members of the Bureau to bring about that successful outcome.

The Government of Saudi Arabia reaffirms its commitment to the implementation of the provisions of this document in a manner that does not contradict Islamic shariah and Saudi Arabia's national laws. I would like this statement to be reflected in the final outcome document of the Conference.

Mr. Al Saidi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I wish to express our thanks to you, Mr. President, to the members of the Bureau and to all the Member States for their efforts to achieve success in this conference and to agree on the consensus document that is before us.

I wish to reaffirm the commitment of the State of Kuwait to implement the document in a manner that does not contradict Islamic shariah or the Constitution of Kuwait. I also would like this statement to be reflected in the final document.

Mr. Al-Absi (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): We wish to congratulate you, Mr. President, and to congratulate ourselves, on the great achievement of this session and to pay tribute to the spirit of understanding that prevailed during its work.

My country's delegation values the great efforts that have led to the outcome document and appreciates the aspirations of those who participated in this session to advance the status of women everywhere. For that reason, we will endeavour to implement everything in this document in accordance with Islamic shariah and our country's Constitution and national laws. We would like this statement to be reflected in the final report.

Mr. Bhatti (Pakistan): On behalf of the people and Government of Pakistan, I wish to express our deepest condolences to and solidarity with the people and Government of the Syrian Arab Republic on the sad demise of their great leader, President Hafez Al-Assad. May God Almighty shower his blessings on his departed soul.

My delegation is very pleased with the adoption of the progressive and forward-looking outcome document by consensus. Pakistan will implement these commitments as a matter of high priority to translate the words into concrete actions on the ground to achieve the objectives of gender equality and development into a living reality. This implementation process will be guided, like the Beijing Platform for Action, by the shariah law and the Constitution of Pakistan.

I also wish to take this opportunity to thank the Chairperson of the Preparatory Committee and the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole, and her other colleagues in the Bureau for their untiring efforts to make this process a success.

I also wish to thank the thousands of non-governmental organization representatives who have greatly contributed to this process by sensitizing the world community to the issues affecting women and children. Our appreciation and thanks also go to the Secretariat, interpreters and everyone else at the United Nations who have contributed to this process.

Ms. Abbar (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) (*spoke in Arabic*): The Libyan delegation wishes to express its heartfelt condolences to the delegation of the Syrian Arab Republic and to the Arab people of Syria on the passing of President Hafez Al-Assad, the great leader,

whose tragic death has been a great loss to the Arab nation. May God bless his soul.

My delegation participated effectively and on a continuous basis in the preparatory process for this session since its inception, with the aim of reaching an accurate, comprehensive document that will help achieve real equality between women and men and a better future for all women. It gives my delegation great pleasure to join this consensus. We wish to reaffirm that we will implement the document in accordance with national laws and in a manner that does not contradict Islam, its tenets and prevalent social and religious traditions. We would like this statement to be reflected in the report of the session.

Mr. Al-Dosari (Bahrain) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, my delegation wishes to express its heartfelt condolences to the people and Government of the Syrian Arab Republic at the passing of the great leader, President Hafez Al-Assad. May his soul rest in peace. May his bereaved family and people be rewarded with endurance and long life.

In brief, my delegation wishes to express its determination to implement the provisions of the document before us in a manner that does not contradict national sovereignty or national legislation, and particularly, the tenets of Islamic shariah. My delegation would like this statement to be reflected in the official records of this meeting.

Mr. Meléndez-Barahona (El Salvador) (*spoke in Spanish*): First of all, I should like, on behalf of the delegation of El Salvador, to express our condolences to the people of the Syrian Arab Republic on the death of President Hafez Al-Assad.

Secondly, we express our appreciation to all of those who have deployed great efforts and acted in the highest spirit of solidarity in working towards the positive outcome we have achieved at this twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, devoted to reviewing the implementation of the commitments taken at the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women and to reaching agreement on fresh actions and initiatives to speed up its full implementation to achieve full gender equality, development and peace.

El Salvador joins the consensus on the adoption of the final document of this review conference, and it reaffirms its full readiness to make a reality of the commitments designed to improve the status of women and enable them to exercise their rights. We thus reaffirm our support for the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

At the same time, however, we would like to make the following statement and request also that it be included in the final document of this session.

With regard to the paragraphs that refer to the issue of abortion and related issues, the delegation of El Salvador would like to place on record that in line with our Constitution, abortion is not permitted under any circumstances, as article 1 of that Constitution recognizes the human person as such from the moment of conception. Reproductive health and family planning services are provided to adolescents with the consent of the parents or legal guardians, but they must never lead to abortion. Let us recall here that at the International Conference on Population and Development, held at Cairo in 1994, the delegation of El Salvador brought forward the relevant reservations with regard to abortion as well as to reproductive health and family planning services.

Ms. Sadia (Kenya): My delegation would like to express our heartfelt sympathy and condolences to the people of the Syrian Arab Republic on the demise of their President, Mr. Hafez Al-Assad. Our delegation prays that God will give them comfort and peace in this difficult time.

Through you, Mr. President, we wish to express our sincere confidence in and gratitude to the Preparatory Committee, chaired initially by Kenya and currently by our sister country Tanzania, and to the entire Bureau for the work that they have done to make this special session of the General Assembly on "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century" a landmark for women.

I would like to commend the work done by the Group of 77 and China and the statement that was made under the chairmanship of Nigeria. My delegation joins the consensus in affirming the outcome document and will endeavour to implement it within the national framework.

Our Government attaches special importance to the family as an important institution and a key factor in the socialization process of children and young people. It will be strengthened and protected, as universally understood.

May I end by saying that issues related to abortion are contained in the penal code of our country, where abortion is illegal. This sensitive issue will be addressed domestically within the framework of the Beijing Platform for Action.

May I once again thank you, Mr. President, for the splendid work that has been done during this session.

Mr. Al-Mahdi (Sudan) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I should like to add my voice to those of my colleagues from other delegations in expressing our heartfelt condolences to the delegation of the Syrian Arab Republic, its Government and its people on the passing of President Hafez Al-Assad, a great leader who worked for a peace based on justice and freedom.

I would like also to commend the position of the Group of 77 and China, as expressed by the delegation of sisterly Nigeria. I should like also to express our satisfaction at the consensus reached on this important document following very difficult, serious and constructive negotiations. My delegation effectively participated, in a spirit of flexibility, seriousness and cooperation, in those negotiations with representatives of other countries.

We renew our commitment to implementing the recommendations of this special session in accordance with our Constitution, our national laws, values and norms and the full respect of our national sovereignty, taking into consideration paragraph 2 (b) of the document.

I should like my intervention to be included in full in the final document of this session.

Mr. Wibisono (Indonesia): In my capacity as Chairman of the Group of Asian States for the month of June, I wish to express our deepest condolences to, and solidarity with, the Government and people of the Syrian Arab Republic on the sad demise of President Hafez Al-Assad.

We respected President Hafez Al-Assad highly as a man who, for three decades, fought to build a strong and proud nation and to deliver his people to their rightful destiny. President Hafez Al-Assad contributed meaningfully to international politics, especially in the Middle East.

On behalf of the delegation of Indonesia, I should like also to express my sincere appreciation to you, Mr. President, and to congratulate the Chairperson of the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole, Ms. Christine Kapalata, all the members of the Bureau, and Ms. Angela King and all United Nations staff. I also commend the active and productive participation of the non-governmental organizations, which contributed to the success of our negotiations leading to the adoption of the important outcome document before us, which will empower women and promote their rights as well as promote gender equality, development and peace.

It is indeed a great accomplishment, and it is due to our relentless efforts to reaffirm our commitment to the advancement of women in all spheres. My delegation reiterates our readiness to work together with all members of the international community in enhancing the status of women everywhere for the well-being of all humankind.

Mrs. Ferrer Gómez (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): I should like at the outset to reiterate to the friendly delegation of the Syrian Arab Republic, and, through it, to the brotherly people of that country our deepest condolences on the sad passing of their late President, Mr. Hafez Al-Assad.

My delegation supports the points made by the delegation of Nigeria in its capacity as chairman of the Group of 77 and China.

The delegation of Cuba wishes to express its great satisfaction with the common task we undertook during these days spent reviewing our achievements and assessing future obstacles and challenges as we seek to make real progress for women throughout the world. Although we have not yet seen or made an in-depth analysis of this document in its entirety in its Spanish language version, we are certain that the balance that has been achieved will contribute in many ways to progress for women and girl children on every continent. We are grateful for the efforts made by all delegations that have worked hard here in the spirit of solidarity to adopt the most effective measures for the advancement of women.

We note for the record that, in the negotiating process on the document we are to adopt today, in the course of which a hard-won consensus was achieved in the context of very informal negotiations on very specific and complex topics, a number of irregularities occasionally arose. As this special session comes to a close, my delegation wishes to state that, in such circumstances, the agreed language in certain

paragraphs reflects the great flexibility and commitment of Cuba to the advancement of women and the process we are finishing today. This reflects a contribution from my country and should not necessarily be construed as setting any precedent for future negotiating processes or later assessments of the results of other ongoing world conferences and summits. That is my delegation's understanding.

Finally, we should like to congratulate Ms. Christine Kapalata, the Chairperson of the Preparatory Committee for the special session, and all the members of her Bureau on their superb work. We also congratulate and thank Ms. Angela King and Ms. Yakin Ertürk for their efforts throughout these months. We also acknowledge the great contributions made by women's non-governmental organizations that were involved in these meetings.

We have all worked with great dedication. Before us is a document that will allow us to assess how far we have come and the measures we have yet to adopt in order to achieve the full implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. We are delighted to note that this has been worth our while and we congratulate everyone. My delegation also congratulates you, Mr. President, on your efforts and on the very positive way you have guided this special session.

The President: The Assembly will now proceed to take a decision on the two draft resolutions recommended by the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole of the Twenty-third Special Session in document A/S-23/10.

We turn first to draft resolution I, entitled "Political declaration". The text of the annex to draft resolution I is contained, for the time being, in paragraph 56 of document A/S-23/2.

Draft resolution I was recommended by the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole of the Twenty-third Special Session for adoption. May I take it that the General Assembly decides to adopt draft resolution I?

Draft resolution I was adopted (resolution S-23/2).

The President: Draft resolution II is entitled "Further actions and initiatives to implement the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action". The text of the annex to draft resolution II is contained, for the time being, in document A/S-23/2/Add.2 [Parts I-IV] and A/S-23/2/Add.2 [Part IV]/Corr.1, as amended by documents A/S-23/AC.1/L.1/Add.1 to 42 and A/S-23/AC.1/L.1/Add.16/Corr.1.

Draft resolution II was recommended by the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole of the Twenty-third Special Session for adoption. May I take it that the General Assembly decides to adopt draft resolution II?

Draft resolution II was adopted (resolution S-23/3).

The President: I shall now call on those representatives who wish to explain their position on the resolutions just adopted.

Mr. Mesdoua (Algeria) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me at the outset to convey to the delegation of the Syrian Arab Republic our condolences on the passing of President Hafez Al-Assad. He was a great Arab leader who played an important and unparalleled role at the international and national levels. History will record President Al-Assad's steadfastness in defence of causes of justice and truth. On this occasion, I wish, on behalf of the Algerian delegation and of the Arabic Group, to convey our heartfelt condolences to the delegation, people and Government of Syria. We pray to the Almighty that his soul may rest in peace. It is to God that we all return.

Allow me also, on behalf of the Arabic Group, to express to you, Sir, our thanks and gratitude for the adoption of the outcome document following lengthy but fruitful efforts. I take this opportunity to express our thanks, particularly to the Chairperson of the Preparatory Committee, the coordinators and facilitators of the working group and the members of the Bureau, who have all striven tirelessly to achieve these satisfactory results. All delegations have participated effectively and positively on this path.

We are confident that, as we enter the third millennium, this document will constitute a new basis for the improvement of the conditions of women and the advancement of their rights and status. During the negotiations, Arab countries demonstrated a spirit of cooperation and flexibility. In this Assembly, they wish once again to confirm their readiness to defend the rights of women and to protect all their achievements of recent years.

Finally, on behalf of the Arab Group, my delegation conveys its thanks to all the members of the United Nations Secretariat, particularly Ms. Angela King and including the interpreters, translators and

those who work behind the scenes, as well as to the non-governmental organizations, which have played a very positive role in this historic achievement.

Ms. Chekrouni (Morocco) (*spoke in Arabic*): On behalf of its people and Government, the Kingdom of Morocco offers its heartfelt condolences to the people and Government of the Syrian Arab Republic on the passing of President Hafez Al-Assad. This is indeed a great loss.

I wish to express the satisfaction and congratulations of the Moroccan delegation on the adoption of the outcome document. We followed the work of the Preparatory Committee with seriousness and great attention. Despite the difficulties in reaching consensus, the dialogue was very positive and constructive. Dialogue is the best way to achieve solidarity among the women of the world, and it led to this fruitful and useful result.

The Kingdom of Morocco will be committed to the implementation of the document, in line with its Constitution, laws and national values. The document will certainly contribute to reinforcing the Government's efforts to improve the economic and social conditions of women.

The national plan to integrate women in development projects, prepared by the Government with the full participation of civil society, is now being studied by a national committee headed by the Prime Minister. This is a strong indication of our sincere efforts on behalf of the cause of women. No democracy or development can be achieved without women.

Finally, we would like to thank the Secretary-General, you, Mr. President, the Chairperson of the Preparatory Committee and the Chairpersons of the Working Groups, and all those others who contributed to the success of this session, serving the cause of women all over the world. We hope that the twenty-first century will indeed be one of rights and effective equality between the two genders.

My delegation would also like this statement to be reflected in the final records of the special session.

Mr. Cherif (Tunisia) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset I would like to express to the brotherly Syrian delegation our heartfelt condolences on the passing away of President Hafez Al-Assad. May he rest in peace. From God we come and unto Him we return.

At the closing of the twenty-third special session, "Women 2000: gender equality, peace and development for the twenty-first century", we would like to express our thanks to you, Mr. President, and to the Chairperson of the Preparatory Committee for the great efforts made to reach the desired results in order to give impetus to the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action.

On behalf of my delegation, I would like to express our satisfaction at the constructive atmosphere in the Ad Hoc Committee which contributed to cooperation between all delegations, in particular with regard to some problems relating to the particular characteristics of each culture. It should be made clear that the fact that those characteristics were taken into consideration in the recommendations does not mean that we are going back on the principles agreed in Beijing.

On that basis, we reaffirm our commitment to the Beijing Conference on improving the status of women as an integral part of human rights, taking into consideration respect for our Arab and Islamic concepts. We also confirm our commitment to advancing the rights of women. We will implement all the recommendations emanating from this special session on the basis of the policies of the President of Tunisia, Mr. Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, and of the various legislative mechanisms and bodies for achieving full equality and equal opportunities for men and women, in order to foster comprehensive and sustainable development.

Ms. Tellawy (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): On behalf of the delegation of Egypt, I wish to convey our condolences to the delegation, Government and people of the Syrian Arab Republic on the passing away of President Hafez Al-Assad. May his soul rest in peace.

The delegation of Egypt would like to make the following observations.

First, we thank all delegations for their cooperation and understanding, which has led to the successful outcome of this session and the adoption of a document that is a step forward after Beijing. The document represents the success of this session and complements the efforts of the international community to achieve progress for women, gender equality and to prevent discrimination against them. The Conferences held over the last 25 years, from Mexico to New York, have achieved a rapprochement and understanding

between different peoples and cultures. We hope that social issues, such as that of women, will not be used as a source of conflict between cultures and civilizations. We will not allow doubts to be cast on the goals and results of United Nations social Conferences, particularly the Conference on Population and Development.

Secondly, Egypt will work hard to implement the document in line with our national policies and laws.

Thirdly, Egypt regrets that the paragraphs concerning financial resources are very weak and not commensurate with the problems faced by women all over the world — particularly in developing countries — with regard to poverty, illiteracy and basic services. We hope that the international community and its institutions will work hard to increase the financial resources needed to empower women.

Fourthly, we thank the non-governmental organizations for their efforts during the special session. We hope that their role will develop to allow for an exchange of experiences, and that it will not be limited to being present here to listen. Instead, we hope that it will develop in such a way as to lead the Secretariat and the specialized agencies to organize other meetings to exchange experience between official delegations and non-governmental organizations. That will lead to exchanges of practical experience at the national level, which will in turn result in understanding language that may be the cause of some misunderstanding. If the efforts of non-governmental organizations at the United Nations were to continue, the Secretariat should take into consideration rules and regulations in line with the norms of the Organization. The delegation of Egypt asked for the holding of a parallel conference with non-governmental organizations during the Cairo conference. We hope that the United Nations will make use of the role of non-governmental organizations in a very organized manner and in an improved environment that will lead to understanding.

In conclusion, the delegation of Egypt would like to thank the members of the Bureau for their efforts, especially Ms. Christine Kapalata of the United Republic of Tanzania, Ms. Kirsten Mlačak of Canada and Mr. Asith Bhattacharjee of India. At the risk of omitting some names, I must mention also Ms. Patricia Flor, Ms. Mónica Martínez and others, along with the Chairmen and other officers of the working groups and negotiating groups. I also thank Ms. Angela King and the other members of the staff of the Division for the Advancement of Women. Finally, I thank the Secretary-General for his support of our efforts at this session.

Mr. Mabilangan (Philippines): My delegation joins others in expressing sincere condolences to the people and the Government of Syria on the passing away of the respected and esteemed President of the Syrian Arab Republic, Mr. Hafez Al-Assad.

Let me express my profound appreciation for the work of the Secretariat, led by Ms. Angela King and by the Director of the Division for the Advancement of Women, Ms. Yakin Ertürk; for the effective management of the special session; and for the patience and flexibility shown by delegations, which led to the adoption of the outcome document and to the successful conclusion of the special session.

It is with great pleasure that we join other delegations, and reaffirm our Government's commitment to the Beijing Platform for Action and to the further actions and initiatives agreed upon at the present session. We would like especially to thank those delegations and non-governmental organizations that supported us in working for stronger commitments to address such issues as trafficking in women and girls, women migrants and women migrant workers, and those in poverty situations, including marginalized and vulnerable groups of women and girls. Our delegation is very pleased with the stronger commitment to these issues under the outcome document; with this we can truly say that we have taken another step forward in advancing the goals of gender equality, development and peace in the twenty-first century.

The Philippine Government will adopt an updated plan of action for gender-responsive development, covering the period 2000-2004, which we hope will fully implement our commitments under the outcome document. Finally, we hope that, through the South-South cooperation adopted as part of the outcome document, partnership among countries will flourish even more, fostering enhanced implementation of our commitments.

Mr. Costa Lobo (Portugal): I should like to make a statement on behalf of the European Union and on behalf of Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Lithuania, Romania and Turkey.

Before addressing matters concerning the special session, I should like to express our sincere condolences on the passing away of President Al-Assad, and to request the Syrian delegation kindly to convey those sentiments to the people and the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic.

The special session, as well as various regional meetings, brought together women from all over the world. Governments, international organizations, the press, non-governmental organizations and other members of civil society have come together, discussed vital issues, shared experiences, learned from one another. We have found new ways to work together towards what we are all here for: the full implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, which, together with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, remains the cornerstone of the pursuit of gender equality.

What happened here is a step forward — maybe a small step, but a step nonetheless — in promoting women's human rights. We have made real progress towards gender equality, development and peace. We have reaffirmed the role of education in the empowerment of women. We agreed on new and clear language on State obligations to end violence against women, including domestic violence, marital rape and crimes committed in the name of "honour". We have recognized the essential role of gender equality and women's participation in poverty-eradication and in development, and the importance of clear targets and indicators for gender equality. We have underlined the enormous contribution women make to the economy and the importance of laws and policies that enable women to make that contribution. There is a clear call that men and women should equally share the tasks of unpaid work, such as household work and caring for dependants. Gender equality is a men's as well as a women's responsibility. We have highlighted the crucial role of non-governmental organizations. We have called for a gender perspective in macroeconomic policies.

We have reaffirmed that the human rights of women include the right to have control over matters related to their sexuality and to decide freely and responsibly about them.

A growing number of countries have introduced legislation to prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. It has not proved possible expressly to mention that achievement in the document we have just adopted. The European Union is committed, by article 13 of the Treaty of Amsterdam, to combat discrimination on the basis of sex, race or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation. Such discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation is incompatible with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and it should be ended.

Although the document just adopted contains a number of crucial issues for gender equality, we are disappointed that it contains no explicit reference to the sexual rights of women. In our opinion, sexual rights are covered in the document, as they were at Beijing. If you recognize these rights, why can you not use the term? We hope that "sexual rights" will very soon become standard terminology in the United Nations. We also regret that it was not possible to utilize in the final outcome document the language agreed last year at the special session on Cairo+5 with regard to abortion issues.

I should like to take this opportunity to express our profound appreciation for the hard work of all those involved in the preparation of this review and of the outcome document. In that context, we express our sincere thanks to the Secretariat, including the interpreters and the conference officers; to the Bureau, particularly the Chair of the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole, the chairs of working groups and the contact group, and facilitators. Our thanks go also to our negotiating partners and to non-governmental organizations; they filled us with enthusiasm and ideas, and kept us on our toes.

We have worked hard for this outcome; it is a real achievement. Let us now all go out and implement it.

Ms. Fry (Canada): Canada would like to convey its sincere sorrow on the passing of President Al-Assad, and to convey our condolences to his family and to his people.

For the past week our negotiators have been working exhausting hours to develop language and a document that is action-oriented and makes gains on Beijing. For this, we are in their debt.

Canada is pleased to join in the consensus that the document before us reflects on the issues which most Member States believe are important to achieving equality for the world's women. Canada brought to the

table many issues which we feel would improve, *de jure* and de facto, the lives of women and girls, not only in our country, but also in many countries of the developing world. We are therefore pleased to see some of these issues adopted here today and reflected in this document.

We note that we have made no gains from Beijing on the inherent right of the person to make decisions about her sexual and reproductive life. The Cairo+5 Conference drew important conclusions in the area of sexual and reproductive rights. Canada remains strongly committed to the principles established by those Conferences. However, Canada is pleased that the document reaffirms and reinforces women's rights as human rights and that there is censure for the abhorrent practice of trafficking in women and girls and an acknowledgement of the compounding role played by new communications technology in this regard.

Canada is also pleased that there is renewed commitment to enhance the relationship between government, non-governmental organizations and civil society at the national and international levels, since we believe that this is essential to the development of practical and effective strategies for the de facto equality of women. We are especially pleased that there has been expanded support for non-governmental organization programmes on race and ethnically based violence.

Our world is diverse. The inequality of women's lives in developed and developing countries demands recognition of diversity of race, religion, class, sexual orientation, age, mental and physical disabilities, and ethnic, indigenous, immigrant and refugee status. Paragraph 2 *bis* recognizes the discrimination that women may experience and the violation of their human rights on a number of these grounds, and underlines the responsibilities of government and the international community to take the necessary steps to prevent and/or remedy such discrimination.

However, we note that the paragraph makes no specific reference to sexual orientation. Discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation is a violation of human rights. This principle is established in Canadian law. On the international level, sexual orientation is included as a prohibited ground of discrimination set out in a number of binding international human rights instruments, either on the grounds of sex or on the grounds of other status. The United Nations Human Rights Commission and other parts of the United Nations human rights system have upheld this position. Given this, we regret that the document fails to include a more explicit reflection of this principle. However, Canada considers that the matter of sexual orientation is encompassed in the reference to "other status" in paragraph 2 *bis*. In sum, Canada considers paragraph 2 *bis* to constitute an unqualified condemnation of discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.

Finally, given that women and their children are the most frequent victims of landmines, given the strong statement of concern in Beijing five years ago, and given the progress made since then, as well as the signature of the Ottawa Treaty, Canada is puzzled and disappointed that there is no reference to landmines in this, a document which is meant to protect women and children.

In conclusion, notwithstanding these reservations, Canada recognizes this document as a move forward towards equality for women in the world, since we believe gender equality to be essential to the world's future economic, social and democratic development and to peace and human security.

Ms. Lawrence (New Zealand): I would like to acknowledge the passing of President Al-Assad of the Syrian Arab Republic and express New Zealand's condolences to the Syrian people.

The New Zealand delegation is pleased that the final outcome document reflects the advances in women's equality that have occurred since the Beijing Platform for Action in 1995. There is, however, still some way to go until full equality is reached. New Zealand will continue to make its contribution beyond Beijing+5.

New Zealand acknowledges that some women face double and triple barriers to their full empowerment. New Zealand is committed to improving the status of its indigenous Maori women. New Zealand is one of a growing number of countries to prohibit, through legal measures, discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation. While this meeting has discussed sexual orientation and not included it in the document, New Zealand interprets "other status" in the introduction to the final outcome statement, in paragraph 2 *bis*, as consistent with its Human Rights Act 1993, to include marital status, ethical belief, colour, national origin, political opinion, employment

status and sexual orientation. New Zealand looks to sexual orientation becoming consistent with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights by the time we meet again to review Beijing+10.

We thank all those who have made this meeting possible, and we ask that this statement be reflected in the final record of the plenary.

Ms. Al-Moosa (Oman): At the outset, on behalf of the delegation of Oman, I would like to express our sincere condolences on the passing of President Hafez Al-Assad of the Syrian Arab Republic and stand in solidarity with the people of Syria in their time of grief.

On behalf of my delegation, I would like to reaffirm our commitment to the Beijing Platform for Action and to the implementation of the further actions in the outcome document, in accordance with our national laws and the Islamic shariah.

My delegation requests that this statement be reflected in the report of this special session.

Ms. Mounina (Mauritania) (*spoke in Arabic*): I too would like to thank all of those who contributed to this session, making it a success.

On behalf of my country, Mauritania, I express our heartfelt condolences to the people of the Syrian Arab Republic, our brotherly people, on the passing of His Excellency, President Hafez Al-Assad.

I would also like to thank you, Mr. President, for the efforts you have made to crown our work with success, and to express our appreciation to the interpretation and translation services of the United Nations. On behalf of my country, I call for more fairness and equality in the translation in all the working languages of the United Nations, particularly for Arabic and French. We believe that such equality would allow us to contribute more equally and fairly in our forthcoming work and make us feel that all countries and groups are treated equally in the United Nations. It would also support the equality we are calling for between men and women.

On behalf of my delegation and my country I wish to reaffirm our commitment to make every effort possible to implement the outcome document of the Conference, provided that it does not run counter to our Constitution and national laws.

I would like this statement to be included in the official records of the session.

Mr. Al-Humaimidi (Iraq) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, my delegation wishes to express its support for the statement of the representative of Algeria, made on behalf of the Arab Group. We express our sincere condolences to the Syrian delegation on the demise of President Hafez Al-Assad. May he rest in peace. We also express our full solidarity with the Syrian people in these circumstances. Syria's tragedy is our collective tragedy.

My delegation also expresses its appreciation for the efforts made by the presidency of the Preparatory Committee, as well as by the members of the Bureau, the Secretariat, the contact and working groups and all facilitators, to arrive at the document before us.

My delegation demonstrated maximum flexibility in order to reach a balanced and consensus document. My Government will respect its provisions and implement it in accordance with our national laws and the provisions of the Iraqi Constitution. My delegation, which participated in all the efforts to arrive at this document, through consultations held at all stages and levels, has joined the consensus in its adoption.

However, we have reservations regarding interpretation of the document — namely, any provisions that might run counter to Islamic shariah and its provisions, as well as to the tenets of the Islamic religion and Arab values and traditions.

My delegation hopes that this statement will be reflected in the documents of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly.

Mr. Øie (Norway): On behalf of the Norwegian delegation, I would like to express our heartfelt condolences to the delegation of the Syrian Arab Republic on the demise of President Hafez Al-Assad.

My delegation truly appreciates the adoption of the political declaration and the outcome document. The outcome document contains important issues and actions necessary for the further and full implementation of the Platform for Action.

Nevertheless, my delegation would have preferred the inclusion of certain additional elements, as reflected in the negotiations by the spokespersons for the JUSCANZ Group. These elements are: the question of discrimination on the grounds of sexual

orientation and recognition of the sexual rights of women and the need for secure and safe abortion, inter alia, the decriminalization of abortion. Our views on these issues were presented by the Norwegian Minister for Children and Family Affairs in her statement in the plenary during this special session.

We are equally disappointed that no agreement could be reached on steps taken after Beijing regarding the use of landmines, which disproportionately affect the lives of girls.

Mr. Nejad Hosseinian (Islamic Republic of Iran): At the outset, I would like to express, on behalf of my Government and people of the Islamic Republic of Iran, our heartfelt condolences and sincere sympathy to the people and Government of the Syrian Arab Republic, on the passing of President Hafez Al-Assad. The loss of President Al-Assad will be greatly felt in our region and beyond.

Allow me to take this opportunity to express, on behalf of the delegation of the Islamic Republic of Iran, our sincere thanks and appreciation to you, Mr. President, for successfully leading this special session of the General Assembly and to the Chairpersons of the Preparatory Committee and the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole, as well as the delegation of Nigeria, as the Chairman of the Group of 77, and the Chairpersons of the working and contact groups, for their excellent work in steering the long and difficult negotiations towards final consensus.

While joining this valuable consensus on the final outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, on Women 2000, supporting its implementation at both the national and international levels and emphasizing the sincere desire and resolve of the Islamic Republic of Iran to realize the goals set out in the final document, I would like to comment and register our reservations on the following points.

On the concept of equality, we are of the view that both men and women are valuable components of humanity, each possessing equally their respective characteristics and potential for intellectual, social, cultural and political development, which are complementary and mutually reinforcing. On the basis of this perspective, which is derived from the Islamic lofty values and beliefs, we interpret the concept of equality as embodied in the respective provisions of the outcome document.

As consistently underlined on numerous occasions by the delegation of the Islamic Republic of Iran, including in our national statement before this special session on 7 June 2000, the centrality of family, as the basic unit of society, should be accorded commensurate attention. Accordingly, we consider the provisions pertaining to family to be of high magnitude, and believe that a more constructive approach on this crucial concept should have been made in the final document.

On matters relating to sexuality and sexual behaviour, particularly paragraph 8 of the unedited final outcome document and the relevant part of paragraph 107 g, I would like to dissociate my delegation from any provision in the text that may encourage, explicitly or otherwise, sexual relations outside the framework of marriage and the family, as defined exclusively as the legitimate union between men and women. The Islamic Republic of Iran upholds the principle that safe and responsible sexual relationships between men and women can only be legitimized within the framework of marriage.

With respect to the issue of inheritance, the Islamic Republic of Iran interprets the relevant provisions of the final document in accordance with the principles of Islam. Moreover, we would like to underline that we will consider any new concepts and terminology not included in the Beijing final outcome document in accordance with Islamic precepts and values and our Constitution.

The Islamic Republic of Iran reaffirms its commitment to the implementation of the final outcome of this review conference, with the objective of promoting respect for women's rights, elevating their status in a real sense, facilitating and institutionalizing their empowerment and ensuring their meaningful participation in all aspects of social life.

The delegation of the Islamic Republic of Iran would like to request that its reservations, as enumerated above, be included in full in the report of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly. The text of these reservations will be subsequently submitted to the secretariat of this session.

Mr. Naber (Jordan) (*spoke in Arabic*): I should like, on behalf of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, to express our heartfelt condolences to the brotherly delegation of the Syrian Arab Republic on the passing

of President Hafez Al-Assad. May God have mercy on him and grant his people and his bereaved family the strength to endure and persevere.

I should like to use the opportunity of the closing of the twenty-third special session to thank all of those who endeavoured to make the negotiations a collective success. My delegation looks forward to the implementation of the recommendations of the outcome document in the hope that we can realize equality and fairness between the genders within the framework of our Jordanian Constitution, which consecrates and guarantees these rights.

Mr. Wehbe (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): My statement consists of two parts. The first pertains to the great loss of our dear President Hafez Al-Assad, and the second to the outcome document.

The delegation of the Syrian Arab Republic would like to convey its heartfelt thanks and appreciation for the sincere condolences and the spirit of solidarity that have been expressed in these difficult times, in which we lost our great leader — may God have mercy on him — President Hafez Al-Assad.

We are bereaved by the death of our President. He was a leader known to all world leaders for his strategic thinking. He had a deep belief in the principles of right and justice and in national causes and in every inch of his homeland. Our President stood consistently in defence of the interests of his people and of the Arab people as a whole.

Throughout his political life, Syria's great leader abided by the principles of international law and those enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations. He believed that these principles formed a legitimate basis for the realization of international justice and for the settlement of regional and international disputes.

Among the many landmark achievements for which history will remember our great leader, we would mention here his direct concern with women's issues. He was determined to guarantee the rights of women and personally to ensure their total emancipation in order to enable them to stand on an equal footing with men in the social sphere, working together for society's advancement.

Our great leader had instructed the chairperson of the delegation of the Syrian Arab Republic to this special session to convey his sincere wishes to the conference and to representatives. He had also requested that she convey these wishes to the women of the world, in the hope that the work of this session would be crowned with success. This attests to the personal importance that the President attached to questions relating to the status of women.

Syria's commitment to the legacy of our great leader, Hafez Al-Assad, is firm and unwavering. Syria will continue the march towards the advancement of women and will work for the realization of a full, just and comprehensive peace, progress and development.

The words of condolence I have heard from you today, Mr. President, and those conveyed by the delegations of our brotherly and friendly countries are highly appreciated in these dark moments. We would like also to thank all of our brothers and sisters who have expressed noble feelings of love and sympathy.

We hope that God Almighty will guarantee your health, Mr. President, and we wish you and your country every success.

May our dear President be blessed with God's mercy. The Syrian people, bereaved by this great tragedy, hope that he will rest in peace.

I should now like to move on to the second part of my statement.

Mr. President, the delegation of the Syrian Arab Republic would like to express to you our sincere congratulations on your outstanding success in undertaking this noble mission. The Syrian delegation would like also to express the highest appreciation to the members of the Bureau and to Ms. Christine Kapalata, Chairperson of the Preparatory Committee, which laid the groundwork for the success of this special session of the General Assembly.

We would be remiss if we failed to express to Ms. Angela King and her dedicated staff our appreciation for their effective contribution, which has enabled the work of our session to be crowned with success. We should not forget the coordinators of the working groups, who chaired the informal negotiations. Our thanks go to them for the strenuous efforts they made.

There are others whom we should thank as well: the interpreters, our unknown soldiers, and our translators. We would also like to thank wholeheartedly the non-governmental organizations, which effectively contributed to the success of our conference.

We express our pleasure at the adoption of the outcome document after arduous but very constructive and fruitful negotiations. Delegations negotiated with a very high sense of responsibility. The delegation of the Syrian Arab Republic, like many others, contributed effectively to those negotiations. This is a great opportunity indeed for us to pay tribute to the positive results achieved by the General Assembly at this special session, which reflect our great will and determination to follow up the Beijing Platform for Action.

The Syrian Arab Republic agrees with the ideas expressed in the outcome document and reiterates its commitment to implementing it in conformity with our Constitution, national legislation and social, cultural and spiritual values and traditions. We do so in full consideration of the need for full respect for our national sovereignty and laws in the context of paragraph 2 of the document and of the aforesaid values and traditions.

We hope that, by acting in this manner, we will be engaging in a serious follow-up of the Platform for Action, raising and promoting the status of women and empowering them politically, socially and economically, so that they may contribute effectively to the achievement of progress at the national and regional levels. We also hope that we will thus be contributing to the advancement of women regionally and globally in the framework of the strategy set for us by our steadfast leader, the late President Hafez Al-Assad, for the promotion of the status of Syrian Arab women. His framework is a scientific and forward-looking approach to the advancement of women.

In conclusion, the delegation of the Syrian Arab Republic kindly requests that its statement be reflected in the final document of this session.

Mr. Rogov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): On behalf of the delegation of Russia, I would like to express our most sincere condolences in connection with the death of the President of Syria, Mr. Al-Assad. Together with the friendly people of Syria, we today express our sorrow at the passing away of this outstanding political leader.

We welcome the successful conclusion of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly of the United Nations, with the consensus adoption of the political outcome document, in which the community of nations attempts to give an answer to the urgent issues encountered by women and the entire world today.

I would like to thank all delegations, the Bureau of the special session, and the coordinators of the Working Groups. We are also grateful to our partners in the non-governmental organizations, who have helped us to reflect the views of civil society in the document of the twenty-third special session. We are grateful to the Secretariat, the interpreters, the translators and all those who have helped us to reach a successful conclusion to the twenty-third special session. The main thing now is to attain maximum encouragement and implementation to turn the political document into a reality.

The President: We have heard the last speaker in explanation of position. I now call on the observer of the Holy See.

Ms. Gray (Holy See): The Holy See wishes to offer the most sincere condolences to the delegation of the Syrian Arab Republic, as well as to the Syrian people, as they mourn the death of President Al-Assad. We join with all the people who pray for his peaceful rest.

The Holy See takes note of the progress that has been made in these past few months in the preparatory process for this special session and cannot but praise the efforts of the international community to advance the condition of women in the world. The delegation of the Holy See has worked in a constructive way, in a spirit of goodwill, to make this outcome document more responsive to women. In this regard, the delegation is pleased with many of the document's provisions, in particular those condemning all forms of violence against women, those upholding women's rights to economic and political empowerment and those which outline measures to eliminate poverty and to provide all women with access to basic social services.

However, my delegation has not failed to point out some serious concerns regarding this review process. From the outset, my delegation has constantly reiterated its compliance with the guidelines set out in General Assembly resolution 54/142 that

> "the special session will be undertaken on the basis of and with full respect for the Platform for Action and that there will be no renegotiation of

the existing agreements contained therein". (*General Assembly resolution 54/142, para. 6*)

As such, it has not escaped the attention of this delegation that many other delegations have not followed these guidelines.

In this regard, my delegation is gravely concerned with the persistent attempts by some delegations to introduce new and undefined terms, including "sexual rights" and "sexual orientation", which can be interpreted to include paedophilia, among other things. These attempts demonstrated a blatant disregard of the General Assembly resolution and consistently obstructed and delayed the entire review process.

The Holy See was able to join with serious reservations in the consensus on the Platform for Action adopted at the Beijing Conference. The Holy See continues to hold these reservations.

Nothing that the Holy See has done in this process should be understood or interpreted as an endorsement of the concepts it cannot support for moral reasons. Especially, nothing is to be understood to imply that the Holy See endorses abortion or has in any way challenged or changed its moral position concerning abortion, contraceptives or sterilization.

The intention of the Holy See is to welcome this consensus decision of the special session and, accordingly, offer its statement of interpretation. I would ask that the text of this statement, which includes the official position of the Holy See as follows, be included in the report of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly.

The Holy See, in conformity with its nature and its particular mission, by welcoming the adoption of the final document of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Further actions and initiatives to implement the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action", wishes to express its understanding of it.

First, the document remains marked by an individualistic and relativistic understanding of sexuality.

Second, regarding the terms "sexual health", "reproductive health" and "sexual and reproductive health", the Holy See considers these terms as applying to a holistic concept of health which embraces the person in the entirety of his or her personality, mind and body and which fosters the achievement of personal maturity and sexuality in the mutual love and decision-making that characterize the conjugal relationship in accordance with moral norms. The Holy See does not consider abortion or access to abortion as a dimension of these terms, nor does the Holy See endorse any form of legislation which gives legal recognition to abortion.

Third, with reference to the terms "contraception", "family planning" and "reproductive rights" and any other term regarding family planning services and regulation of fertility, the Holy See's welcoming the consensus decision should in no way be interpreted as constituting a change in its well-known position concerning these family planning methods, which the Catholic Church considers morally unacceptable, or on family planning services which do not respect the liberty of the spouses' human dignity and the human rights of those concerned.

Fourth, with reference to all international agreements, in particular to any existing agreements mentioned in this document, the Holy See reserves its position in this regard, consistent with the Holy See's acceptance or non-acceptance of them.

Fifth, with regard to the term "gender", the Holy See reserves its position with the understanding that this is grounded in biological sexual identity — that is, the two sexes, male and female.

Sixth, the Holy See reaffirms that the education of young people — including children, girls, adolescents, young women and young men — including education on sexual and reproductive health, is primarily and fundamentally the right, duty and responsibilities of parents, in accordance with paragraph 3 of article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.

Seventh, with regard to the access of young people, including children, girls, adolescents, young women and young men, to family planning services and sexual and reproductive health services, the Holy See considers this to mean married couples and the individual men and women who constitute a couple. In this, the Holy See wishes to give emphasis to the particular aspect of mutual love and decision-making that characterize the marital relationship.

The Holy See maintains that nothing in the outcome document or in other documents referenced therein is to be interpreted as requiring any health professional or health facility to perform, cooperate with, refer or arrange for services to which they have objections on the basis of religious belief or moral or ethical conviction.

With respect to paragraphs 9 and 107 (i) of the unedited outcome document, the Holy See affirms that human life begins at the moment of conception and that life must be defended and protected. The Holy See can never condone abortion or policies that favour abortion. The Holy See further affirms that the right of conscience of health-service providers is assured by, inter alia, article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The Holy See asks that this be noted in the proper place in the renumbering of the formal document.

The Holy See requests that this statement of interpretation be included verbatim in the final report of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly.

The President: We thus have concluded our consideration of agenda items 8, 9 and 10.

Closing statement by the President

The President: What a difference a day makes! We are now at a stage where we had hoped to be 24 hours ago. Hours of around-the-clock negotiations finally paid off, and we have just adopted a document to move the global agenda for the advancement of women beyond the Platform for Action adopted at the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women. The road has been long and arduous, but we can now breathe a collective sigh of relief. For, as I always knew we would, Member States reached agreement at this twenty-third special session of the General Assembly on an outcome document that will chart the course for further actions and initiatives to implement the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. The Platform — as everybody present knows — identified 12 critical areas of concern affecting women's lives.

We can all congratulate ourselves on a job well done. There was no backward movement on any of the Beijing language and commitments. The Platform, with its numerous proposals for action, remains fully valid for national and international actions. Indeed, the text we have just adopted updates the Beijing Platform, further strengthening the document in the areas of violence against women, trafficking in women, health — including the right to sexual and reproductive health — education, human rights, poverty, debt relief and globalization, armed conflict, sovereignty, land and inheritance rights for women, political participation and decision-making.

In the many statements heard in the Hall, delegates drew attention to the obstacles and challenges remaining for the achievement of women's empowerment and gender equality. We also heard many innovative proposals for effectively implementing the text in the next phase. By adopting this outcome document today, Governments have committed themselves to the Beijing Platform for Action and the way forward.

We gathered at United Nations Headquarters from 5 to 9 June with a single purpose, namely, to further the global agenda for the advancement of women through inclusive governance, empowerment and gender equality. If Governments demonstrate the necessary political will and allocate the human and financial resources required, I am convinced that the goals of gender equality, development and peace will become a reality very early in the twenty-first century. Organizations of the United Nations system, the Bretton Woods institutions, the World Trade Organization, other international and regional intergovernmental bodies, parliaments, civil society — including the private sector and non-governmental organizations — and other entities are called upon to support government efforts and develop complementary programmes of their own to achieve full and effective implementation of the Platform for Action. It is clear that all of us are stakeholders in this common endeavour.

In their various statements, Governments, observers, heads of United Nations programmes and agencies, non-governmental organizations and others reviewed and appraised the progress made towards women's advancement by implementing the Beijing Platform. In all, we heard a total of 207 speakers in the plenary — 178 Member States, three non-Member States, 16 observers, four heads of United Nations programmes and specialized agencies, one United Nations committee and five non-governmental organizations — 77 per cent of whom were women. Additional statements were made in the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole.

Attendance at the special session was impressive. Some 2,300 individuals, not including the staff of Permanent Missions, participated. Both the special session and the 1995 Beijing Conference benefited immensely from the involvement and participation of non-governmental organizations, of which there were 2,043 representing 1,036 accredited organizations from throughout the world, not to mention the more than 2,000 non-governmental organizations sponsored by the host country and other Governments. That number would have been far greater had the United Nations building been able to accommodate more people. The document we have just adopted acknowledges the vital role that non-governmental organizations must continue to play as active partners with Governments and the United Nations system in the promotion of gender equality, development and peace everywhere. We heard the voices and the pleas of their representatives both in plenary meeting and in the Ad Hoc Committee.

Let me express appreciation to everyone present for their commitment and dedication to advancing the rights of women. Special thanks go to my colleagues, the Vice-Presidents of the General Assembly; to the Chairperson of the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole, Ms. Christine Kapalata; to the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, Ms. Angela King; to the staff of the Division for the Advancement of Women; to the General Assembly and conference services staff; to my own staff; to all United Nations agencies and bodies; and to the ever-dutiful interpreters and translators: to everyone, for their tireless efforts in making the twenty-third special session a resounding success.

I wish also to acknowledge the presence at this special session of two eminent women: the former Secretaries-General of the United Nations women's conferences held at Nairobi and at Beijing: Mrs. Gertrude Mongella of Tanzania and Mrs. Letitia Ramos-Shahani of the Philippines.

We can indeed take pride in the accomplishments of this first special session of the millennium. In that context, let us acknowledge the efforts of all involved during the many months of preparations, at all levels. In a little more than two weeks, many of us will meet again, this time at Geneva, for the General Assembly's twenty-fourth special session, on social development. There, participants will examine the implementation of the 10 commitments made at the 1995 World Summit for Social Development, held at Copenhagen, for the eradication of poverty, the achievement of full employment and the inclusion and participation of all people in society. These two special sessions are significant in that they both address the need for equality, social justice, resources for development, and human rights, among other issues.

I wish all in this Hall Godspeed as they return to their homes. All's well that ends well. It is now onward to Geneva: Geneva here we come! I will see many representatives there.

Agenda item 2 (*continued*)

Minute of silent prayer or meditation

The President: We have now come to the end of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly. I invite representatives to stand and observe one minute of silent prayer or meditation.

The members of the General Assembly observed a minute of silent prayer or meditation.

Closure of the twenty-third special session

The President: I declare closed the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly.

The meeting rose at 8.10 p.m.